

WASHINGTON, DC (January 12, 2012) – Today Rep. Jan Schakowsky sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to make sure that USDA is utilizing all possible resources to make bonus and specialty crop purchases of nutritious food such as beans, corn cream, and potatoes to benefit *The Emergency Food Assistance Program* (TEFAP) and support our nation's food banks .

“Millions of Americans are either still unemployed for long periods or are working for reduced wages, making it difficult to feed their families,” said **Rep. Jan Schakowsky**. “As the need for emergency food assistance remains high, food banks in Illinois and across the nation are stretched thin. In my district, there are 14 Greater Chicago Food Depository member pantries that rely on USDA commodities through TEFAP to help nearly 10,000 families put food on the table each month. While food banks receive generous donations, food banks cannot meet the need in their communities without TEFAP commodities that provide vital nutritious food.”

Declines in TEFAP commodities due to strong agricultural markets have resulted in greatly reduced supplies of surplus agricultural products. In 2010, TEFAP provided approximately \$655 million worth of healthy and nutritious food. In 2011, that number declined by 30 percent or \$196 million. These declines are expected to continue if action is not taken and could hurt families in Illinois, where food banks rely on TEFAP for about 30 percent of the food they distribute.

While SNAP - formerly called the Food Stamp Program - is the centerpiece of the federal nutrition assistance safety net, nearly 23 million Americans are food insecure yet have incomes too high to allow them to qualify for SNAP. Others who are enrolled on SNAP find that their monthly benefits are running out before the end of the month. Food banks are essential to ensuring that those individuals and families can put food on the table. Without regular and adequate supplies of TEFAP commodities, many food banks will be unable to fully meet this need.

The letter urges Secretary Vilsack to be proactive with regard to TEFAP purchases, applying bonus purchase criteria as liberally as possible and making specialty crop purchases early and often.

A copy of the letter is attached [here](#) .

###